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BOOK REVIEW

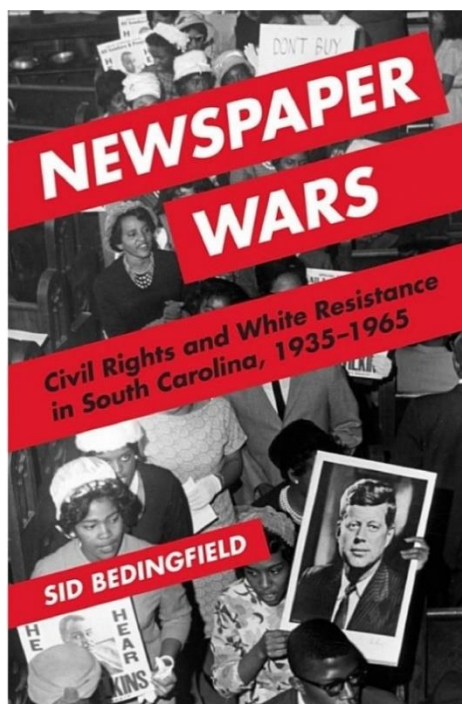
Newspaper Wars: Civil Rights and White Resistance in South Carolina, 1935-1965

Sid Bedingfield

University of Illinois Press, 2017, \$29

How much influence did the black and white newspapers of South Carolina have on the transformation of the state's politics in the mid-twentieth century? Author Sid Bedingfield argues far more than had previously been assumed and he presents valid evidence to prove his point. He details how the African American press would use their newspapers as a rallying point against the injustices of segregation and as a center for a new black activism. Any success or recognition for the African Americans, however minor, would produce a fierce counter backlash in the white southern press, who would slant news coverage and editorials to support their views that white rule was both natural and necessary.

The author concentrates on two extended periods of African American action followed by white southerner counteraction, one following World War I and the other with the election of FDR and the New Deal. The focus is on South Carolina and the bulk of the book is on the career of Jack McCray, African-American publisher of the short-lived *Charleston Lighthouse* (1939-1941) and later the influential *Lighthouse and Informer* (1941-1954) newspaper based in Columbia. Modjeska Montheith Simkins and Osceola E. McKaine, perhaps more familiar names, played significant roles in the story.



McCray's undertakings include joining the NAACP's battle for equal pay for South Carolina African American teachers, creation of the Progressive Democratic Party, voter registration drives, challenging the seating of white delegates at the National Democratic Party Convention, and highlighting the Supreme Court case, *Briggs v. Elliott* (the first of five cases that challenged school racial segregation and was eventually combined into *Brown v. Board of Education*), in his newspaper. His activism would earn him two months

on a South Carolina chain gang and the breakup of his marriage.

Most white newspapers up to 1947 had a paternalistic and aristocratic attitude toward their fellow South Carolinians, insisting their "blacks" were content with second-class status, without any real understanding of the current reality of working class whites and African American lives. When events would challenge that view, William Watts Ball, editor of the *Charleston News and Courier*, would be among the most vocal and most active working against proposed changes to "the southern way of life." Later, Thomas R. Waring, Jr., the next *News and Courier* editor, and William D. Workman, Jr., the paper's chief political columnist, would lead South Carolina's "massive resistance" to the Supreme Court decision ending "separate

but equal” public schools. Readers interested in a different angle on the Civil Rights Era in South Carolina or the impact of public media will enjoy. Bedingfield connects with readers by using distinct and different personalities to illustrate and intensify his themes. The author has been Assistant Professor at the University of Minnesota’s School of Journalism and Mass Communication since 2014. He was a Visiting Professor at the University of South Carolina and an Executive Vice President of CNN. There have been at least two published dissertations on similar topics, published histories of individual white newspapers of this state and African American ones elsewhere, a history of the media in South Carolina that barely mentions Civil Rights reporting, and a few biographies of newspaper editors and publisher. However, not much that looks at the cultural battle on both sides in the local media to shape public opinion on race and citizenship. This readable, well-researched book is recommended for libraries with strong South Carolina collections or a demand for Civil Rights Era sources.

Marianne Cawley is the Manager of the South Carolina Room/Charleston Archives for the Charleston County Public Library.